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Milk Haulin', Etc.

Flora Del Hallock Hubbard

One of my fondest early childhood memories was riding on the back of my father's red Ford milk truck. Prior to the bulk tank era, hauling farmers' milk in and around the Flat Creek–Mackey area during the '40s and '50s provided a means of income for several families with trucks. In 1942, my dad Ivan Eugene ("Gene") Hallock purchased Jay Mattice's milk route. Seven days a week, through rain, sleet, icy roads and deep snow, Gene traveled to the surrounding farms to pick up the farmers' canned milk. The Daitch creamery in Roxbury assigned each farmer a number which was painted on their milk cans and lids. The Stewart Mace farm was #62 for example. Each heavy galvanized metal can with a tin lining weighed about 15 lb. and held 85 lb. of milk.

Skillfully, my father maneuvered his truck through the farmers' barn yards and/or pulled up near their milk houses. Being a strong man, he would hoist each can from a sunken, spring-fed water vat used to keep the milk cool. In a rhythmic swinging motion, Pop loaded the 100 lb. can of milk on the platform bed of the truck. While at the farm, he unloaded the empty cans belonging to the farm for the next morning's load of milk. It was important to keep the truck bed organized—shifting the proper "empties" and the "fulls" until the last pick-up. Five cans per farm was about average; some had two, while others 10–12 cans. Stewart Mace tells me that in the springtime when the farmers were "flush" with milk, my dad had a smaller truck to pick up the milk from farmers farther out to later be double-decked on to the larger truck. To keep the milk cans cool on a hot summer's morning, Pop would break up large blocks of ice (perhaps from my grandparents' ice house) and spread them among the cans. Then the load would be covered with a heavy canvas.

When Pop arrived at the creamery, he swung each full can onto a track leading to a doorway into the building to be dumped and weighed. Out of the left door, the roller track carried the scalding-hot sterilized cans to be reloaded. He righted the upturned lids and closed up the cans to keep them sanitary.

Once my father left the creamery, he often had to stop along the way home to fill orders for the farmers. Sometimes a farmer needed various animal feeds from Lutz's or Harley's feed store in Grand Gorge. Many times he would stop for farm supplies such as strainer cloths, rubbers for the milking machines, etc. Pop had a good memory. Most of the local farmers' orders were committed to his memory. Stewart Mace recalls that Gene seemed to deliver the goods faithfully without writing an order. Occasionally, my father would be asked to pick up some groceries for the farmers' wives or stop at Draffen's store for boots. Sometimes the wife asked him to purchase feminine hygiene products while at the grocery store. Imagine my father's humiliation! When

my brother and I were accompanying our father to the creamery, we would tease him to stop at Don Savage's store in Grand Gorge on the way home for some candy or a cookie, or if we were really good, ice cream.

My dad was trusted to deliver all his farmers' bi-monthly milk checks from the creamery. The truckers' own pay check was based on per 100 lb. of milk averaging about 5 cents to 12 cents per 100 weight at that time.

Vernon Pickett Jr., a veteran 19-year milk hauler, and I recalled WW II war times when it was difficult to buy a truck, as well as maintain one with tires, gas, etc. These items, along with many others, were rationed per family. Because my dad was classified as a milk hauler, he became eligible to purchase his milk truck. Pop was his own mechanic, maintaining the truck in good running order and making repairs when necessary.

Around 1946 or '47, Vernon Pickett Sr. took over Gene's route. (My father was offered a construction job driving a Euclid on Route 145, Windy Ridge project.) Vernon Sr. expanded the milk route until September of 1953. His son Vernon ("Verne") Pickett Jr. started hauling milk for his father on weekends when he got his driver's license in 1949. In 1953 Verne purchased a new green 3/4 ton Chevrolet truck for \$1325 (including GM's best heater) and paid his father \$200 for his milk route. He hauled until 1971. By that time a new law was passed requiring the hauler to have the unladen weight, tare weight, and gross weight painted on the left side of the truck. Verne recalls hauling from at least 26 farms. Those from Flat Creek-Mackey, Broome Center area were: Stanley Brown farm, Carlton Hallock, Raymond Maybie, Roy Mower, Valley View Farm, Merel Hubbard, Ben Benson, Franklin Clapper, Sonny Peterson, Tony Harrington, John Juried, Ernie Bremer, Thurston Peterson, Fritz Klenow, Raymond Brown, Lyle Blakesley, Clifton Hubbard, Clarence Ellis. Seven days a week, Verne hauled to Sealtest in Grand Gorge and unloaded a portion of the cans. After the empty cans were reloaded, he would drive on to Daitch in Roxbury to deliver the rest of the milk, complete the process, and head home. In the winter, if a heavy snow storm was forecast with the possibility the roads would be closed, Verne made an extra trip back to each farm, dropping off the empty cans for the next day's milk. Often, after arriving back home, Verne would unload the truck and promptly leave for Forest City, PA for a load of coal for a family. Before leaving the mine the load was rinsed with water to remove the coal dust. Invariably, Verne returned home with the load—frozen solid and ice hanging off the truck.

My husband, Clifton LaVerne Hubbard, began hauling milk in 1951, driving a green 1.5-ton dual wheel International KB 160. Being only seventeen, he would start his pick-ups early in the morning, regardless of the weather, so he could get to Gilboa school for classes. He hauled about 40 milk cans to the Dairyman's League/Tuscan creamery in North Blenheim. His route took him from the Clifton Hubbard homestead, on to Clarence Ellis, Kenneth Cooke, Sarbackers in Spruce Swamp, George Bailey, Stewart Mace, and the Almon Haskin farms. He often used the truck to deliver sawdust, logs, hay (loose or baled), salt blocks, etc. Like most haulers, he did his own truck maintenance. Between milk runs, he often stopped at Raymond Brandow's garage in Gilboa for gas, oil, and parts.

The milk haulers' trucks never "sat idle." Daily, once the milk and sundry items were delivered to their proper places, the farmers and neighbors needed the milk truck for many other purposes. A few times Stewart Mace needed my father's truck to get his boar hog to another farm for breeding purposes. Stewart loves to describe the details about transporting his mare horse on the back of Gene's truck to Windham to be bred. I recall the time when my father hauled a load of furniture to Brooklyn, NY via Harlem. Our family filled the cab, so my Uncle Harold rode on the back amongst the load, sitting in the rocking chair. What a sight that must have been as my father drove through New York City and Harold waved at the city folks!

Shortly after the Catskill Game Farm opened, my father contracted to haul hay and feed for the animals. At that time, there were only white-tail deer, a few fallow deer roaming freely, and a few monkeys in cages.

During the mid-forties, fifties, and early sixties, eight homes along Flat Creek Road hosted guests from New York City, Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The “boarders” from Valley View Farm (Verne’s home), the Meadows Farm (my parents’ boarding house), the Merel Hubbard farm, and the Almon Haskin farm liked to be entertained country-style. Most of the people did not have cars, so it was up to the owners of the boarding houses to provide entertainment. The most popular entertainment was loading up the milk truck with loose hay and traveling around the side roads. Men, women, and children sang old camp songs at the top of their lungs. I remember taking our guests to the carnival in Grand Gorge or the movies in Stamford. Verne Pickett remembers borrowing my dad’s milk truck to take their guests to the free outdoor movies in Middleburgh and Schoharie. Sometimes the main streets would be closed off for square dancing. Chairs were set up along the street. Another time the guests were taken to a round and square dance at the CCC camp in Breakabeen. Occasionally, the men got drunk and the women had to assist them onto the truck. When they returned “home,” one of the inebriated men thought he would return the favor, carefully helping the women and reminding them to “watch your step.” He then promptly fell off the truck.

There were times when large amounts of hot water were needed on the farm. After emptying the milk cans, the creamery filled the cans three quarters full and then heated the water with a steam hose. Verne says that the whole truck shook from the pressure. The hot water was used to help farmers when they butchered their pigs, or to thaw out frozen water pipes and drains, etc. Raymond Whitbeck, who lived in the area at the time, recalls that when he was baptized at the Flat Creek Baptist Church, Verne supplied the indoor baptistry with cans of hot water from the creamery. Interestingly, Raymond’s job was also vital to the local farmers. When their milk cans became too rusty, the creamery would set them aside. Raymond owned a truck and traveled all over New York State to collect the deteriorating cans and truck them to Interstate Retinning Co. in Brooklyn, NY to be retined inside and out.

What became of those outdated milk cans? That’s, as they say, a “whole ’nother story.” Think about the last milk can you saw and remember what it was used for.

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